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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000073

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SUBJECT: KRG PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY OF DEFENSE MEET IN
SPIRIT OF COOPERATION

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a meeting on December 21 Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masoud Barzani expressed gratitude to Secretary of Defense Gates for U.S. assistance and said the Kurds look forward to continued cooperation. Accompanied by the Ambassador, General Pace, and Ambassador Satterfield, Gates assured Barzani of the U.S. commitment to Iraq and the region. Barzani told the SecDef that Iraq needs clearly defined positions both physically and politically, and explained that moderate political forces are working to form a front that will give the government the popular backing to make tough decisions and uphold the rule of law. Barzani assured the SecDef that the Kurds are committed to a single unified Iraq. END SUMMARY.

Gratitude and a Spirit of Cooperation

¶2. (C) Barzani expressed his gratitude to the U.S for its assistance in toppling the dictatorship. He said Kurds and American have bled together, and the Kurds will continue working very hard and in cooperation with the Ambassador and General Casey to find a solution to the security problem. He expressed pride that not one U.S. soldier had been injured in the Kurdish Region. He said he speaks for all Kurds when he says they would welcome a U.S. base in the Kurdish Region.

¶3. (C) Secretary Gates thanked Barzani and assured him of President Bush's commitment to Iraq for as long as he is President, as well as to a long term presence in the Persian Gulf. He said the U.S. is not going to impose a government on Iraq, but it is prepared to help Iraqis sort through their problems and protect the rights of all.

Barzani Calls for Clearly Defined Positions

¶4. (C) Barzani predicted the situation will get worse if we do not find real solutions. He told the Secretary that the Kurds are not part of the problem but will be part of the solution. He said the U.S. provided them a great opportunity to build a new Iraq, but Iraqis need clearly defined positions, both physically and politically. They cannot build a democratic state based on chauvinistic views and thoughts. He said moderate political leaders have been working to create a political front that represents the people and provides popular support to the government, but some forces are undermining the government from within and using government facilities and equipment to violate the law.

¶5. (C) Barzani said neither the Kurds nor the U.S. can help

the Shia and Sunnis if they do not want help. He outlined two alternatives to a moderate front. The first option is holding new elections, but this requires forming a new government with a different balance - the key difference would be allowing the majority to form the government. The second option is to impose a solution that stops the killing. No one wants this, but any alternative improves on the status quo. He said they need a government that can uphold the rule of law - they cannot participate in a state where 20-70 bodies are found everyday in the streets.

Sunni, Shia Mindsets a Problem

¶16. (C) Barzani described two long-standing conflicts in Iraq: one between Sunni and Shia, and one between Kurds and Arabs. He told the SecDef that the Kurds have stopped teaching the tradition of revenge and adopted a mindset of forgiveness and reconciliation. Unfortunately, he said, the Arabs still follow the revenge tradition. He expressed his conviction to put all that behind them and to focus on the future. He outlined two wars underway in Iraq - the war against terrorism and the sectarian war. He said the Kurds also suffer and hurt but have refused to be dragged in to a civil war, despite 2,000 Kurds killed and 3,000 families expelled from Mosul.

¶17. (C) Another problem, he said, is the mindset of "our brothers the Sunni Arabs." They ruled illegitimately for 80 years, and they still think they should rule. They do not believe in the philosophy of partnership - their opposition to federalism is grounded in this view. He said he has worked hard to create a partnership between them because

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whether they or we like it or not Iraq is made of three parts (Sunni, Shia, and Kurd).

Unity the Best Way

¶18. (C) Secretary Gates thanked Barzani and expressed his appreciation for the constructive role the Kurds have played in Iraq. Then he told Barzani that when he was in Iraq in September the Kurds expressed their desire for independence, but they thought under current conditions it would last only a few months before war broke out. Therefore, they said, the framework of a single Iraq is the best way to protect their people for now.

¶19. (C) Barzani replied that the independence movement in the Kurdish Region has gained traction, but his government continues to advise them that Iraqi unity is the best way. He explained that they have been mistreated throughout their history, and like every other people they want their own nation. He said the Ambassador has visited the Kurdish Region and stood where the Barzani family started fighting for freedom in 1892, but, he explained, they cannot go on fighting forever and they cannot live in an environment of partial freedom.
KHALILZAD